Dear Community Partners,

Last year was a pivotal time for us to reflect on our past, assess what we have accomplished in partnership with our grant partners and plan for the future of how we will ensure the Greater Houston, and the state of Texas, become a place where all people have the opportunity to improve their lives. During the last year we have engaged in internal capacity building, deep reflection among the staff and board on our vision for the future and looking back on our history and founding values. We are now ready to deepen our social justice journey with existing partners and organizational leaders we have yet to meet, and we will move forward in alignment with our founder’s intent and guiding values: Equity, Inclusion, Respect and Empathy.

Our New Strategy
How we do our work in 2020 and years to come has changed, but who we are remains very much the same. Since our founding, The Simmons Foundation has been one of the leading philanthropic organizations in Houston funding policy and program change by building and sharing power with the communities the Foundation exists to serve. We work alongside social justice leaders closest to historical injustice. Mindful of how personal and community factors intersect, we take action to build movements for equitable systems change, we incorporate healing for those on the front lines and we identify and share stories of progress to ensure Houston, and the state of Texas, become a place where all people thrive.

You may be wondering how our work will change. In short, we are leaning more into our work as a Social Justice funder. That means our work is directed at:

- **Systems Change** – We will deepen and form new partnerships with organizational leaders committed to building the power of all people - particularly marginalized groups - to create opportunities for themselves; because this work takes time, we will make greater investments for longer periods.
- **Streamline** – Our grants will be more closely aligned with our values and focus deeply on the areas in which we have always invested that make us unique in philanthropy.
- **Leveraging Our Resources**– Grantmaking is only one tool available to us, so we will also invest in capacity building, provide more flexible funding and increase the leadership capacity of our partners.
- **Learning** – We will focus more on co-learning, sharing our learning journey and seeking feedback from the community.
Our New Priorities

As a Social Justice funder, we fund advocacy, operations, programs and direct services, capacity building and strategies that amplify community voice. We prioritize relationship-building with movement builders and leaders over a burdensome application process. In order to deepen relationships and allow space for co-learning, we will be moving toward a closed process, where we will invite organizations to apply for grants rather than maintain an open application. We are eager to partner with organizations focused on:

- **Women’s healthcare and reproductive justice** – Advocacy and comprehensive care, including access to birth control, scientifically accurate sexual health and all choice options

- **Immigrant justice** – Legal and social services as well as immigrant rights

- **Youth justice** – Child welfare, school discipline reform, criminalized youth and homelessness

- **Gender justice** – Interpersonal violence, LGBTQ+ rights and support for women and girls

- **Community power building** – Organizing, civic engagement and community-driven change

We will be reaching out to community partners to invite them to apply for a grant beginning in March 2020.

The Year Ahead

In 2020, we will continue to hold quarterly information sessions for current grant partners only. The information session in each quarter will be mandatory, by invitation only and for that cohort (i.e., Second Quarter Information Session is for Health grantees and so on). These sessions are an opportunity for networking, co-learning and engagement with Foundation staff and community partners. We will continue to host our monthly coffee chats and offer opportunities throughout the year to engage with organizations that are currently not being funded and interested in learning about the Foundation and sharing the work that they are doing.

We will continue to engage in our local and national learning communities and remain transparent throughout our process. We will also create multiple opportunities to engage with grant partners and attend meetings and events hosted by the community-at-large to continue to learn, share and adjust our approach along the way. In fact, we are determined to share stories about the progress we and our partners make toward achieving our mission and realize our vision for Houston and Texas above and beyond what we have previously shared.
Over the coming months we will be developing a FAQ page under the 2020 Grantmaking tab on our website with anticipated questions and concerns. We will continuously update the page as we embark on our Social Justice Journey — I encourage you to visit this page throughout 2020. We will also share more information on our 2019 learning journey and how it shaped this new direction. Visit our website to follow us on social media, sign up for our newsletter and to read stories of progress.

We could not be more excited for this new chapter for The Simmons Foundation. I assure you that we are here for you. To that same end, I request your patience. To change how we work and continuously adapt to ensure we are an effective Social Justice funder will not be easy — we have much to learn and will have to ask ourselves questions we do not yet know to ask. Our promise is that we will remain diligent and responsive to our partners and the communities we exist to serve, and every day will result in steps toward systems change as well as present unique challenges.

I will end with gratitude. Many thanks to our Board and staff for their commitment to this process and a willingness to be vulnerable in challenging traditional philanthropic structures. Thank you, our partners, for your patience during 2019 and your continued commitment to the vital work in the nonprofit sector. We value your partnership tremendously. I am excited to build socially just communities in the coming years, and I look forward to sharing stories of progress and what we learn with you along the way. Here’s to Social Justice in 2020 and in years to come!

Warmly,

[Signature]